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NEW V CORPS COUNCIL LINKS FAMILY READINESS GROUPS FOR COMMON SUPPORT

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HEIDELBERG, Germany -- Those who look out for V Corps Soldiers and their families have a new ally -- the V Corps Family Readiness Advisory Council.

The council, developed by corps senior family readiness leaders, met for the first time at the Patrick Henry Village Pavilion here recently to increase and improve interaction between corps leadership and the corps' subordinate unit Family Readiness Groups. The council's intent is to use the combined



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Maj. Gen. Walter Wojdakowski, V Corps deputy commanding general, addresses the first meeting of the V Corps Family Readiness Advisory Council at the Village Pavilion on Patrick Henry Village in Heidelberg, Germany. The council was formed as a way to help the corps' family readiness groups pool their expertise and support.

knowledge and experience of family support groups throughout the corps to work, to ensure that resources and assistance are available to FRGs when and where they are needed most.

"The corps leadership needs the input from all of you so that we know what has to be done, to take care of our families throughout all of Germany," Lt. Gen. Ricardo

Sanchez, V Corps commanding general, told FRG leaders in his opening remarks at the meeting. "You are truly important to our Soldiers and our readiness.

"1st Armored Division and 1st Infantry Division experienced all the difficulties in dealing with family readiness issues (during their recent deployments), and they did an excellent job," Sanchez added. "We have to sustain this effort to care for families because by spring of next year, 40 percent of the corps will again be deployed."

During the meeting, unit senior FRG leaders had a chance to talk with each other and share their understanding of the diversity of the issues they face as deployments begin and end, help each other better prepare for those issues, and develop more efficient ways to support deploying Soldiers and their family members.

Throughout the conference, V Corps senior leaders addressed key FRG concerns. Maj. Gen. Walter Wojdakowski, V Corps deputy commanding general, spoke about the realignment of forces in Europe and upcoming family readiness challenges, pledging his support to help FRGs to prepare for future deployments and changes.

"First, this corps has tremendous experience and expertise (in its family members) ... because virtually all our brigades and both divisions have deployed to the war and have redeployed. They have just done a magnificent job," said Wojdakowski.

"Secondly, (because) the corps is such a large and complex, dynamic organization, the leadership of the corps wants to make sure that the family readiness group leaders and family members can get straight to the leadership in an expeditious manner when they need assistance, have good ideas, need resources or need questions answered."

The meeting allowed senior FRG leaders from units across the corps' major subordinate commands to foster teamwork and strong relationships, as well as to gain some new tools to help them communicate more consistently with each other.

Guest speaker Angela Crist took that communication capability even further, discussing interactive FRG tools available on the World Wide Web, particularly <http://frg.army.mil>, a web site designed to facilitate sharing of information and ideas between FRG leaders worldwide. While the site is currently only accessible to users from computers within the military domain, Crist said there are plans to make it accessible to all computers.

Connecting FRG leaders from around the world in a vibrant conversation about solid leadership should increase the effectiveness of family readiness programs, and that should increase the effectiveness of units, she said. FRG leaders provide a valuable service, she added, and they are not alone in the fight to help Soldiers.

Wojdakowski said the successful redeployment of the corps headquarters from Iraq offers a good opportunity to refresh and rejuvenate its functions. With many corps units getting ready to deploy again within the next six months, and 1st Infantry Division getting closer to returning home, he added, it is also a vital time to support and prepare families for the future.

"While each of the corps units is unique, with diverse programs and needs, they all have insight, experiences, expertise and lessons learned that the VFRAC will help them share," he said. He stressed that the council is not a military organization, but a network of family members working together for common goals that support Soldiers.

Bobby O. Buxbaum said the initial VFRAC meeting was an indication that an overarching family readiness network should be a good tool that helps make FRG and family support more efficient. "The other FRG leaders and units had a lot of the (same) concerns that I did, and they (senior leaders) answered them. I think this type of forum really helped ... even other FRG leaders offered their assistance to help us make our job easier."

"I am going to take a lot of this information and pass this along to my eight FRG leaders," said Robert L. Patton, family readiness support assistant for the corps' 18th Military Police Brigade.

Patton, whose brigade already has one unit deployed and one unit getting ready to go, said the VFRAC will provide an excellent forum for resolving issues quickly.

"This is going to help out with redeployment and reintegration. This is a better avenue to voice our concerns and bring out any problems that we may have, that only the senior leadership can address," he said.

"The mere presence of the leaders here sends a huge message that family readiness is important," said Col David K. MacEwen, V Corps personnel officer. "Although not every issue will be resolved to the satisfaction of every person, the corps is taking the time and is actively involved and very supportive of the V Corps Soldiers."

"The senior leadership is very committed to this. This is to maintain the focus, whether we are deployed or redeploying," he said. "I think it is a beginning of us formalizing the structure of overall family readiness of the corps ... having a structure

in place that gives the units' FRGs someplace to link in the command group, to help pass information and best practices that can't be resolved at their level."

"It is a wonderful initiative that really gets to the core values of our Army."

